DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 218 590 CS 006 734

AUTHOR Raburn, Josephine
TITLE Who-o-o Reads Ghost Stories?
PUB DATE Mar 82
NOTE 28p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Oklahoma Reading Council of the International Reading Association (28th, Lawton, OK, March 12-13, 1982).

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC02 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Academically Gifted; *Adolescent Literature; *Childrens Literature; Elementary Secondary Education; Literary Criticism; *Literary Devices; *Literary Genres; *Literature Appreciation; *Reading Interests; Reading Materials; Short Stories; Student Interests; Student Needs
IDENTIFIERS *Ghost Stories

ABSTRACT

Ghost stories are most appealing in early adolescence, from the ages of 11 to 14 years. They are a natural for use with gifted children because they depend entirely upon language for their effect. The high interest they hold for a young person because of their subject matter also makes them a possibility for reluctant readers. As a psychological experience, ghost stories help young children understand their own emotions and feelings. As religious experiences, they plug children into their past, and help them to explore that unknown area--death. As time-shift experiences, they challenge the students who read them to be historians and philosophers. Ghost stories that explore such themes include "Ghost around the House," "The Driftway," "The Scarecrows," "Miss Ghost," "The Ghost of Thomas Kempe," "The Watch House," "The Almost Year," "The Poltergeist of Jacob Morey," "The Haunted Mountain," "The Otherwise Girl," "The Ghost Downstairs," "A Christmas Carol," "The Haunted Man and the Ghost's Bargain," "The Ghost Belonged to Me," "The Crime of Martin Coverly," "The House on Parchment Street," "The Keeping Room," "The Truth about Stone Hollow," "The Court of the Stone Children," "A Midnight Garden," and "Blackbeard's Ghost." (HOD)

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WHO-O-O READS GHOST STORIES?

A paper presented to the Oklahoma Reading Council on March 12, 1982

By

Dr. Josephine Raburn
Associate Professor
Language Arts
Cameron University
Lawton, Oklahoma

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Who-o-o reads ghost stories? Robert Carlsen in Books and the Teenaged Reader says that ghost stories are most appealing in early adolescence, from the ages of 11 to 14 years. That would be roughly 5th grade through 8th grade. In his annual research to determine what young adults are finding interesting today, the supernatural still rates high. In 1980, Carlson lamented the fact that not many books were available for them in that year on this subject. In 1981 there were several ghost stories in British and American publisher output.

What is a ghost story, and how did the form originate? Well, of course, it came from folklore. If you look in The Motif Index, there is a whole section about the dead. Folk stories are about malevolent spirits, friendly spirits, shadows, werewolves, vampires, and all forms of the dead or undead.

All people seem to have had a belief that the dead could often return in some kind of a visible or sensory form. Combine this with the demons and spirits that peopled all of nature in the eyes of primitive man, evolve thought up to the contemporary concept of the soul, and you have almost unlimited possibilities for ghosts.

Now we know that most of these old stories which have come to us from the oral tradition have a kernel of truth in them. Most educated people call that truth symbol. It says one thing, but it is really talking about something else. All writers, composers, and other creators of fine art, know that mining

the folk lode is a good idea, especially when young people are the audience. It plugs them into their past. With ghost stories, though, we have another dimension to consider. Perhaps you have heard it said that we can no longer produce good fairy stories today because no one believes in fairies anymore. That is not true about ghost stories. Let me quote from The Dictionary of Folklore:

> "In the Western world, belief in revenants (ghosts) has been on the wane since the 18th century, but ghost lore is still a vigorous element in any area where folklore thrives. It is to be collected not only among the illiterate, but among sophisticated groups...especially in England." P. 933.

That is a good explanation for why many of the great ghost stories are by British authors. Some of the stories have elements that make them useful with reluctant readers and some of them will appeal to gifted children, although most of the people writing on those subjects neglect to include this type of story. It is a regretable oversight since many of the stories have elements that are identified by the experts as important. For example, Barbara Baskin and Karen Harris, writing in their Books for the Gifted Child, say that language is the most basic tool for thinking, and that literature presents children with important language patterns that help them to internalize the ideas of others. If this is true, the ghost story is a natural for use with gifted children because it depends entirely on language for its effect. The style of

the writer delivers the experience in a ghost story, and plot is much less important than it is in other novels. Language in a ghost story is not merely decorative or atmospheric. It is fundamental, and may cause an actual bodily reaction, such as goose bumps or chills or some other transient fear reaction in the reader.

Basken and Harris also say that children with high ability require demanding fare that leaves them with as many questions as answers so that they are constantly contemplating, analyzing, and judging what they read. Again, the ghost story qualifies because there are plenty of questions to think about after reading one of those!

Many ghost stories are extremely good as literature. A surprising number of them have won awards, or are by award winning authors. They appear regularly on "Best Books for Children" or "Best Books for Young Adults" lists published annually by The American Library Association. They are listed in The Children's Catalog, a nationally recognized list of outstanding books for children up to and including 8th grade level, although they are not often called ghost stories in this publication. Ghost stories deal with aspects of the universe that puzzle even the most brilliant minds, and they are well written. That makes them suitable for average readers and gifted readers.

I do not think them suitable fare for the poor reader who cannot break down a word into its meaning, but the high interest

they hold for a young person because of their subject matter, make some of them a possibility for reluctant readers. Many of them are 4th grade reading level. They are short. That is one of the requirements of any ghost story because the effect it creates cannot be sustained over a long period of time. Ghost stories are filled with conventions, and the child who has little experience with reading stories likes the predictability of learned conventions. They give him safety and reassurance. In a ghost story the reader knows that there is always a reason that the ghost walks and that this will be revealed as the story progresses. Perhaps the ghost was not buried properly. Maybe it must atone for some great sin. At times it comes to warn of great danger. At other times it comes to provide information about a concealed treasure. It may just be some form of evil which has been released in the world. No matter why it walks, when the ghost has appeared and reappeared several times, it will finally disappear forever. Ghost stories have a restricted cast of characters, and often have many short sentences. All of these things make them appealing to reluctant readers who have some reading skills, but are not proficient at the task.

Now that I have built my case for the importance of ghost stories, let's look at some actual examples. I will not talk about any of the collections of folktales about ghosts which are available for children. A number of these exist, but I

will limit this presentation to novels about ghosts. I hope to classify the stories by type, although this will certainly not be clear-cut in many cases, determine a reading level using Fry's formula, and assess the literary value as I see it. Ghost stories for younger children, with friendly, funny ghosts will not be included since they aren't true ghost stories.

Sometimes an author will use a ghost or ghosts as a literary device to get across a message to the reader. These follow the other conventions, but leave something to be desired as literature. A Ghost Around the House by William MacKellar is an example. This author has written several ghost stories. He is a former Scotsman who moved to Connecticut and became an American. In this particular book, Ghost Around the House, an old castle was moved from Scotland to New England, and its ghost, who died in 1712 came with it. A 12-year old boy takes the ghost home to live with his family. Father is an art teacher in a community college, mother is a housewife, and there is a 20-year-old sister whose silly boyfriend is a political activist. He provides the comedy relief. Ghost stories often use humor to relieve tension, or to disguise or distance horror. This creates a strange paradox. The humor intensifies the horror by making it manageable, and the reader tends to lay aside his scepticism and to accept the story as real.

This ghost is a good artists who has been a student of Hogarth and Watteau. The boy's father is not a good artist,

but he begins to win art shows with the help of the ghost. The father tells everyone that the ghost is painting for him, because the messages of the book are: "Don't take credit for something you didn't do," and "Never lie to yourself." When the ghost finally learns the last lesson, he gets to go home (back to Scotland) to a peaceful grave. Before leaving he writes a goodbye letter to the boy in which he tells him that the curse has been lifted after "I repented my sin of pride." This one is fourth grade reading level, and, despite its didacticism is not dull. If it happens to be in your collection, some of the reluctant readers might enjoy it.

The Driftway by Penelope Lively is about a young boy named Paul who takes his sister and runs away from home. They have a new stepmother and they do not like her. On top of that Paul has just been accused of shoplifting in a store because he absent-mindedly put something into his pocket. As the children escape they are picked up by a man called Bill, who lets them ride in his horse-drawn cart along the driftway to their grandmother's house in another town. A driftway is a narrow country road along which cattle and other animals are moved, so there is vegetation along the sides of it for them to graze. Shadows of happenings on this road remain, and the ghosts of these events appear to Paul. One of the people he sees is his own grandmother as a young woman. Finally,

after seeing all of these troubles which are worse than his own, Paul comes to realize that "you think everything is happening just to you, but it isn't. It's happening to other people, too." He begins to try to see his stepmother's viewpoint and to understand her. The reading level of this one varies from second grade in some spots to sixth grade in others. It flashes English history by the reader in a way that reminds us of Kipling's Puck stories. It seems to fit two classifications--the ghost as a literary device to convey a message to the reader, and the ghost as a device to focus attention on certain aspects of the subconscious.

It is difficult to talk directly to children about psychological problems, but, if those problems are personified in the form of ghosts, they become objective and concrete.

There are several ways that ghosts may be used in psychological stories. They may come unbidden, and in those cases, when they leave it is satisfying because their coming has changed things for the better. The ghost helps a character to actively change his circumstances instead of just being a passive victim of them.

Another way is that a troubled mind may invoke a ghost, and then there are two persons, each with a different point of view, instead of just one person being torn apart by conflicts.

In other cases the ghost represents those dark forces of evil, such as the passion for revenge, that lurk within us all.

The normal human response to injustice is the desire for revenge, but we all fear the terrible things of which we might be capable if such desires were uncontrolled by the conscious mind. The evil ghost allows a young person to safely explore those terrifying aspects of his own personality.

In The Scarecrows by Robert Westall a 13-year-old boy, Simon, is deeply disturned by his mother's second marriage to a jovial, sloppy, fat artist, Joe, whom his little sister adores. Joe tries to be a father to Simon, but is rejected completely every time he makes an overture. Across a turnip patch from where they live is an old abandoned mill. It has been unused for 20 years--ever since a horrible murder was committed there over a woman--the miller's wife. Joe knows of Simon's fascination with the mill and tells him that it is dangerous and that he must never try to start it up because it is so old that it might explode. Of course, Simon has to start it. The sounds of its vibration, "tong, tong, tong, tong," and the water going "shee shee shee shee" across the wheel are chilling, because at first he can't stop it. Later, at the edge of the turnip field on a dark and cloudy night, a more chilling event occurs when Simon calls to his dead father, "Come, Help me. Come Come Come." He feels something answer, but it isn't his father. Then the scarecrows, which have been made out of the clothes of the murdered man, his wife, and the wife's lover, begin to advance

across the field. Simon cannot stop them as he stopped the mill. They are indestructible. He is terrified of the scarecrows, but he cannot defeat them alone. He needs Joe's help. But Joe is the one he hates and wants to kill--just like the smaller scarecrow had killed the bigger one long ago. He and Joe are both fighting over his mother's love. Aren't they? There are deep insights into adolescent emotions in this book. The hatred in Simon will surely destroy him if he cannot overcome it. The reading level is 6th grade, but the emotional level is much higher.

Another book with sixth grade reading level is Ruth Arthur's Miss Ghost. It is short and much easier to understand. Mrs. Arthur is a British author who taught school for four years before she married and had six children of her own. Elphie, the main character of Miss Ghost, survives one terrible blow after another. First, her mother takes her beloved younger brother and runs away to Australia with another man. This causes her father to have a nervous breakdown so that he has to be placed in a mental institution. Elphie goes to Scotland to live with her maternal gradmother, and she has a loving, warm relationship with Granny Gil, but Granny is a terrible driver and is killed in an automobile accident. As a result, Elphie must go to a foster home in a small village in England where the people are very superstitious, and they blame her for every mishap that occurs to anyone living there. Elphie's

family throws her out, and she is so demoralized that she must be sent to a home for disturbed children. There, high in an unused tower, she meets a ghost named Miss Ada Seaton. This lady, like Elphie, was accused during her lifetime of making bad things happen to people. When Miss Ghost, as Elphie calls her, can be seen clearly, Elphie feels drained and exhausted. When Miss Ghost is thin and transparent, Elphie is strong. This is a clear message to the reader that the ghost is really a part of Elphie herself. As things begin to get better for her, the ghost disappears.

Often psychological ghost stories have to deal with poltergeists, those noisy, mischievous, and malevolent ghosts that only appear when a teenager is in the house. The teenager is usually a female, but not always. Penelope Lively and Robert Westall have both written poltergeist stories. Lively's The Ghost of Thomas Kempe has as its hero James Harrison, aged 12 years. A dimension of James's personality is personified as the ghost, Thomas Kempe, a thoroughly obnoxious poltergeist who writes notes that are derogatory, and throws objects around. James wants to get rid of him, and tries every remedy to no avail. Through the ghost James learns of his own capacity for evil, and consciously rejects it. As he works to overcome his wickedness, Thomas Kempe is worn down and must beg for mercy. Eventually he is glad to return to his 1629 grave beneath the church. James's total victory over his darker side is compared

in the story to an earlier child's confrontation with Thomas Kempe in 1856. This child, Arthur, had merely "bottled up the ghost" instead of vanquishing him.

Robert Westall's, The Watch House, is about a girl who has a delinquent mother. Anne's parents are divorcing and the mother's boyfriend is giving her wet, open-mouthed kisses behind the mother's back. Finally, to get rid of her daughter, the mother palms her off on the girl's former Nanny, who, with her Husband, Arthur, takes care of an old shipping museum called The Watch House. It is haunted, but when Anne appears with all of her problems, even the ghosts begin to terrorize one another. A skull named The Hague breaks out of a glass case, shattering it. Another ghost, Old Feller, throws a glass through the air, hitting Anne's girlfriend, Pat, and then going beyond her with such force as to gouge a piece from a solid oak window frame. Old Feller asks Anne for help against The Hague. Anne begins to realize that she and her Dad have given her mother the power that she has against them, just as The Hague has gotten bigger feeding on Old Feller's terror. Old Feller, too, was enabled to become bigger and noiser because Anne listened to him. The climax to this one is violent and horrifying, but when the skull is given a Christian burial, all is set to rest. Anne, the reader feels, is going to be able to handle her own person problems now. Both The Watch House and The Ghost of Thomas Kempe are fourth grade reading level.

An American story, The Almost Year by Florence Randall was a Best Book of 1971, and the author claims that it was based on a true incident. A white family brings a black teenager to live with them for a year because there are problems in her family. She is very unhappy to have been put into such a situation, and weird, poltergeist-type things happen to the house. Stones rain down on it, for example.

Another American story, The Poltergeist of Jacob Morey by Gloria Skurzynski, is about a boy with problems. Eleven-year-old Jason Morey is an orphan with a kooky, rich grandmother. He is not welcome in any of the boarding schools where she tries to enrol him, so she asks her nephew, a school teacher, to take him in. Immediately a poltergeist begins to work. The family, consisting of the mother, father and two teenaged daughters, studies what is known to psychology and to religion about this phenomenon and the reader ends up with quite an education on the subject. Jacob's new family is determined to rout the ghost through the power of love, but they are not prepared for the violence that erupts around them. No human being is killed, but the reader feels danger and an animal loses its life.

It has always been a characteristic of dreams or of folktales that personality traits or feelings are personified. How appropriate to put those hard to define feelings as ghosts,

because ghosts have little substance. Ghosts can also be either good or evil--as inner feelings often are.

I call the next classification of ghost stories religious stories. Today one can hardly separate the world of spirits from the world of souls, but it was not always so. When primitive man believed that all trees, rocks, wind, water, and air--all vegetation, disease, and animal life had spirit, the world was alive with demons and ghosts. When these people were first converted to Christianity they still believed the old along with the new and would use the symbol of the cross to drive off evil spirits. Mollie Hunter is one of our leading contemporary authors for adolescents. She lives in Inverness, Scotland and usually writes historical fiction about Scotland or Scottish folklore. The Haunted Mountain is a ghost story which takes place in the highlands of Scotland where the sidhe or fairies rule. A man wanted to take a beautiful woman as his wife, but his hilly farm would not support two people. He decided to farm the Goodman's Croft which was always set aside for the sidhe. The Goodman's Croft was the best land MacAlister had and he harvested two big sacks of barley from it. The sidhe sent a creature which was half goat and half man to get the barley, but MacAlister and his dog chased this creature and scattered the barley on the ground. MacAlister then quickly scratched a great cross into the soil so that the sidhe could not change into birds and harvest the barley. Birds came by the hundreds, but were turned away by the cross. McAlister

married his beautiful bride and they had a son. Time passed, but the sidhe had not forgotten him and eventually they were to have a terrible revenge. They spirited him away and chained him to a rock for 7 years, forcing him to mine jewels from the mountain ruled over by the King of the Sidhe, a great stone man. This huge stone man was shattered into a pile of rocks when MacAlister's young son rescued him from the sidhe, and the stone man's ghost must forever wander the mountain where he died. This is a common story among Teutonic peoples and almost every mountain peak and range has its petrified giant, representing hostile nature. Hunter's Scottish rendition is 8th grade reading level.

The Otherwise Girl by Keith Claire also has religious elements. A girl, 13 years old, was washed over a wier (dam) while swimming in a river. She was drowned, but eight years later when a 15-year-old boy goes to study art with a man who lives close to the spot where the tragedy occurred, he encounters her ghost. The boy becomes very friendly with this girl who is called Chloe, and he later finds out that she lives half in one world and half in another. She must go over the dam again and again throughout eternity. One day the boy is with her as she acts out the circumstances of her death, and he tries to rescue her by grabbing her long, red hair. This somehow frees her to go forever to a place on the other side which she hints is better than the world. The book leads the reader to believe

that Chloe had been doomed to death as a ghost because her parents had let her be the Brat in a traditional harvest ceremony practiced in her village. This ceremony was part of an ancient religion, and the Brat was a stealer of souls. Such a story may be comforting to an adolescent because it seems to be proof that there is really something wonderful beyond the material world. Keith Claire is the pseudonym of a husband and wife writing team from Surrey England. They are really Keith and Claire Andrews. The Otherwise Girl is fourth grade reading level, but the interest level is adolescent. It was a "Best Book for Young Adults" in 1976, and would be good for reluctant readers.

Another British ghost story which could be classified as a religious story is Leon Garfield's, The Ghost Downstairs. This one is 7th grade reading level, and it is also a complicated story with a lot of symbolism. It is recommended for the gifted reader, who, after finishing it may want to make some comparisons with some of Charles Dickens' works such as A Christmas Carol or The Haunted Man and the Ghost's Bargain. It is the story of a lonely, envious, and greedy lawyer's clerk named Mr. Fast, who sells 7 years off of his life to a ghost named Mr. Fishbane. Mr. Fast thinks that he has tricked Mr. Fishbane because he chooses the first seven years of his life instead of the last. Mr. Fishbane must be the devil because soon after the bargain a ghostly child appears everywhere with

him. Sometimes the child is alone and rolling a phantom hoop. The law clerk tries to strangle the child, but feels fingers around his own throat as he does. There is an image of hell, a frightening incident in St. Paul's cathedral, and a terrifying climax. Only Mr. Fast is aware of the true nature of the child's character, because when it has been removed from his own personality, the despicable adult that he was becomes loveable and good. It takes careful reading to get the full impact of this story.

An American story which is humerous as well as being a piece of historical fiction about Illinois in 1913, is also a religious story because its ghost must walk until she receives a Christian burial. This is The Ghost Belonged to Me by Richard Peck and is 4th grade reading level. The ghost is a young girl who wears a green dress with hoop skirts, and she has a small dog named Trixie. She lives in the barn of a family who are on the way up financially and who try to also move up the social ladder. Having a ghost on the premises is embarassing to the mother and sister of the family, but not to the young son, Alexander.

The Crime of Martin Coverly by Leonard Wibberly could fit two categories. I put it in the religious stories because the ghost in it cannot rest until he has atoned for his sin, but it could also be a time-shift story. Nick Ormsby, 16 years of age, lives in Key West, Florida. He is a junior at Key

West High School, and he likes to sail. His father was lost at sea when Nick was 15, and this is a common occurrence in his family. In every generation someone is lost at sea. Nick goes to live with his uncle, Hillary Ormsby, in an old and isolated house on the outskirts of Key West, and he begins to read about pirates in his uncle's library. The house is over two centuries old, and a ghost dressed in 200-year-old clothes appears to Nick. The ghost is a pirate, and he tells Nick to be at Shark Island on February 20, 1721.

This is the only ghost story talked about today which uses smell as a convention. The belief that ghosts have a distinctive odor is a common one in Europe, and Mr. Wibberley was born in Ireland. The odors are used very effectively to create atmosphere. Rotted seaweek smell, and a strange dish of salted cod which has an offensive odor are both noticed when the ghosts appear.

Nick and his uncle go sailing to Shark Island, and they are transported back to the 1700's. Nick is sentenced to the gallows, but the ghost, Martin Coverly, takes his place. He should have done this 200 years ago for the nephew who died for him then. When he does the right thing, at last, the curse is lifted, the ghost can finally rest, and no more family members will be lost at sea.

The last religious story is another British one, <u>The House on Parchment Street</u> by Patricia McKillip. An American girl, Carol Christopher, goes to visit her aunt and uncle in Britain.

She is skinny and red headed. With her cousin, Bruce, and his friend, Alexander, they find a priest tunnel which runs from the cellar of their rented home to the church across the street. They find this tunnel because they see ghosts go through the stone walls of the cellar every day at 4:00 p.m. The ghosts walk because the priest who had been murdered long ago had never received Christian burial. His bones still lie in the tunnel where he fell. This one is 4th grade reading level, and it can almost qualify for high/low status since it is now available in paperback.

The third category has already been mentioned. It is the time displacement category. Thomas Hardy once described ghosts as figures of the lost past--what might have been.

In The Keeping Room by Betty Levin, a history teacher has asked his 8th grade students to learn about history first hand by finding out what their town used to be like in the past. Hal, the main character, is assigned an old farm called the Titcomb place where long ago a small girl named Hannah disappeared and was never seen again. Hal sometimes babysits his teacher's five-year-old daughter, Emily, and Emily sees the ghost of a cow and the ghost of Hannah. Then Emily disappears. Later, bulldozers marking out a road through the area dig up Hannah's bones and immediately afterwards Emily is found. She says that she has been with Hannah. This story is 5th grade reading level and has ecological themes.

Another American story in this category is The Truth About Stone Hollow by Zilpha Keatley Snyder. A place where the Indians used to go to have visions still has a strange power to alter time. Loops come out from it, and ghosts can be seen according to what personal belongings of the dead are close by. This power is very dangerous, and when sixth grade Amy takes a piece of the stone into her aunt's attic where all of the family antiques are stored, she meets the wicked-looking ghost of her grandfather. Amy is petrified with fear, and she learns that people are often contradictions of good and evil because her grandfather was a minister. This story is about sixth graders, but the reading level is 7th grade.

Time shift stories are about the past as it feeds the present--or about time and growth relationships. The ghost story can pull away all of the layers like peeling an onion--or it can sift through the sediment of history. It is a way to explore what might have been, as Thomas Hardy has said, but it is also a way to explore what has been.

The most outstanding of the American stories of this type is probably The Court of the Stone Children by Candian born Eleanor Cameron. It won a National Book Award in 1974. A young girl, Nina, meets a young noblewoman from Napoleon's time in a French museum in San Francisco. Here you have shadows of people and layers of time. The ghost, Dominque, tells Nina that there are "worlds within worlds, each invisible to the other because we travel on different levels of awareness." Only

rarely are some people allowed to see beyond their own time. This is an idea which may intrigue young people--that the past, present, and future all exist at once in space, and that time is an invention of man.

Nina knows and likes a boy named Gil whose father is a physicist. Gil has been studying time and thinks that at the very edge of our perception things may come in from other layers of time. This is one of the devices used in ghost stories on the theory that things seen at the edges of our span of vision are more frightening to us.

As a child, Dominque, the ghost, has had a dream which we recognize as the setting of the present story--a museum in San Francisco. The dream introduces her to Nina (who has not yet been born) as the one who will prove Dominque's father innocent of the charges trumped up by Napoleon in order to put him to death. Dominque disappears when her father is cleared of wrong doing. The reading level is 8th grade, and the gifted child could pursue ideas of relativity, space, and time as a result of thinking about this one. A painting by Chagall called "Time is a River without Banks" is used throughout the story as a symbol of the philosophy of the book, so the reader might also explore the art of Chagall. The writing is of superior quality, and will probably be appreciated only by the mature gifted. Court of the Stone Children has an animal ghost, Dominique's cat, which appears with her.

A House Full of Echoes by Mara Kay was first published in England under the title, Restless Shadows. This story takes place in Russia, and is a reinactment of horrors that took place in the past. Six young women go to be students in the Astrovo's school in the year 1818. Astrovo family fortunes need to be augmented, so their fine Russian estate is turned into a school for young women. A young lady named Marguerite is taken to the school by her brother, Gaston. They see a ghostly party in progress. Later, when Gaston comes to the school to stay, his arrival precipitates the reenactment of a romantic tragedy that threatens some of their lives. In the past, Olga loved Alexander who loved a lower class girl named Yani. In the present, Ada loved Gaston who loved Irini, the daughter of a rich merchant who is not of the gentry. Mara Kay was born in Europe, but is now an American by choice. The ghostly atmosphere is very well done in this one, but some of the reviewers criticized it for not having much plot. A ghost story does not really need much plot, so I would rate it very high because of the chills it inspires. The reading level is 6th grade.

Two British novels are outstanding examples of this type. The Children of Green Knowe by Lucy Boston dates from the 1950's and is a celebration of parallel lives. The author bought an old house, and she says that she can feel the children from its past all around her. The house in the story is Lucy Boston's

house, and the hero, Tolly, is patterned after her own son, now grown. The Tolly of the story, abandoned by his father and stepmother who must move to Burma, goes to live in his family's ancestral castle with his great grandmother. There are gardens with shrubbery pruned into the shapes of animals and into the shape of one man, Green Noah, who has no eyes. There are old stone statues, one of St. Christopher, and a painting of three children who lived long ago. The boy's loneliness, and the grandmother's stories produce the ghosts of the children, who then play with Tolly. The ghosts warn Tolly to beware of Green Noah, and not to tease him, but one day Tolly forgets and torments the tree-man. That night the classical warm fireside inside and cold night outside form the setting for Tolly's encounter with the menacing tree. He wandered too far from the house before discovering that Green Noah is alive and is pursuing him. Green Noah is blind, but can get around in the darkness of this black night better than Tolly. Lowering trees are often used in ghost stories, but this one is particularly frightening because it is in the shape of a man whose shaggy arms have not been trimmed properly. These leafy appendages are whipped in the wind, and are visible only when jagged streaks of lightening flash through the blackness. The reading and interest levels are both 6th grade.

The second book is Tom's Midnight Garden by Phillipa Pearce. Tom has been sent to stay with an aunt and uncle while his little brother recovers from the measles. He is very lonely, and the flat is ugly and utterly without a garden. At midnight, however, magic occurs and a Victorian garden surrounds the house. Tom is a ghost in this garden, and he finds a playmate there named Hatty. Sometimes when Tom comes to the garden Hatty is older, and sometimes she is younger. This one explores the reality of time, but it also presents another idea to ponder. Once having lived a situation is it gone forever? Or is it still in existence forever, so that one may return to it again? The book forces the reader to look at old people in a new way, and to think of them as they were when they were children. The reading level is 6th grade, but there is a gold mine of philosophy possible with this one.

And last, I'd like to talk about a ghost story that does not fit any classification. It is Blackbeard's Ghost by Ben Stahl, and it won Oklahoma's Sequoyah award in 1967. In it some junior high school boys find a paper in the dungeon below an old tavern that is being torn down. The paper has a spell written on it, and through the spell, the boys return a witch and an old pirate to life. Both of them have been in Hell. Ben Stahl admitted in his acceptance speech for The Sequoyah Children's Book Award that he did not know how to write a ghost story when he started this book. He did believe in ghosts, at

least as a child. His book does not follow the accepted conventions. Who ever heard of a ghost who came back from Hell--and then stayed forever on the earth as a ghost? Children loved it, and the book was made into a movie.

Many children, like Ben Stahl, do believe in ghosts because primitive, magical laws still govern their outlook and attitudes. A ghost story can help children to deal with fears of the unknown because ghosts never really harm anyone, but the icy chill of fear is deliciously threatening.

As a psychological experience ghost stories help a young person understand his or her own emotions and feelings. As religious experiences they plug children into their past, and help them to explore that unknown area we call death. As time-shift experiences they dare all who read them to be historians and philosophers.

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